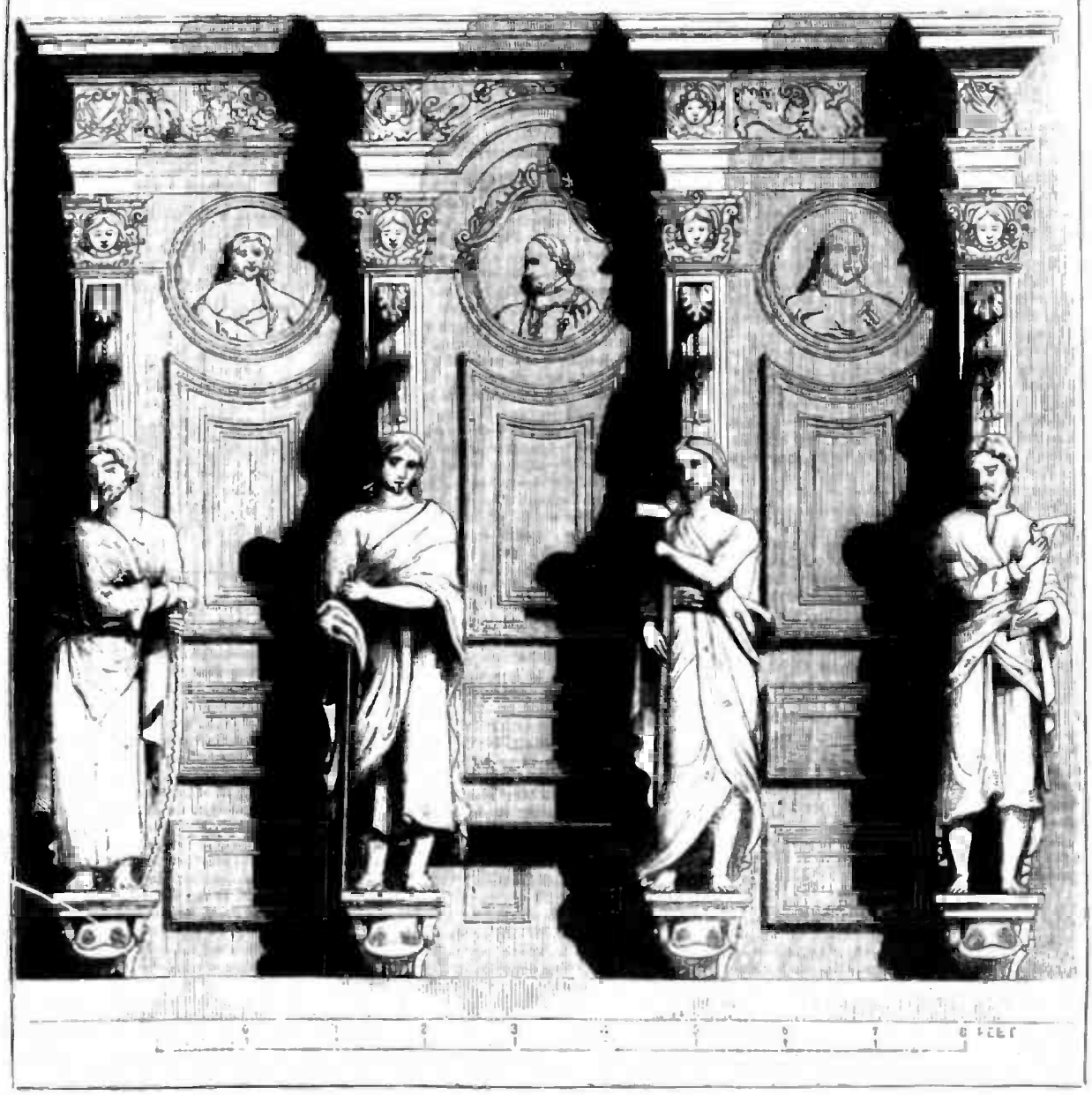
## CARVED WOODWORK IN ANTWERP CATHEDRAL.



### ANTWERP AND ITS CHURCHES.

Although Antwerp may not present, to the eye of the artist, such an appearance of antiquity as Ghent, Bruges, and other towns of Belgium, or that air of comfort and elegance so observable in Brussels, yet it is impossible for a stranger to behold, for the first time, the many churches, palaces, and other public buildings, of the extent, magnificence, and solidity which characterize those of Antwerp, without surprise and admiration; and these feelings will be considerably enhanced if it is borne in mind, that many of the fairest places in the city were erected in seasons of tumult, and amid civil and political conflicts. If we consider the great commercial advantages Antwerp possessed, we need not wonder that it should have attained to that pitch of wealth and grandeur which has always been found most favourable to the encouragement and development of the fine arts. In painting, it went hand-in-hand with Italy, and supplied England with a succession of able masters, who became the favourites of the sovereigns they served, and were the means of diffusing a love of art throughout the land, which has ever since been on the increase. Nor was it behind in architectural skill—in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it produced those grand examples which have since been the admiration of all Europe.

It is almost impossible to give a just idea of the beauty of the churches here; it is very easy to call to mind the effect produced by each noble pile—the rich windows of the one, the graceful arches of another, the wondrous aisles of the cathedral, or the richly carved confessionals of St. Paul—all come readily back to one's own eye, but are so difficult to put fairly before the eyes of another. This is perhaps of less importance, now that Antwerp is within a day's journey, so that nearly every person may see and admire for himself.

Sir Walter Scott, no mean authority in such matters, declared that the Cathedral of Notre Dame was one of the grandest pieces of architecture which Europe could shew. In point of size alone, it must always excite astonishment, its length being about 500 feet, and the breadth, exclusive of the transepts, about 250 feet. The height of the nave is said to be 360 feet, and many of the noble piers which support the vaulting are twenty-seven feet in circumference.* Every other part corresponds as to size and magnificence. The tower is not to be surpassed for beauty of design, although at a distance the great profusion and delicacy of the ornament render the outline rather confused. Had both towers been completed (which was evidently the intention), the west front would have been unequalled.† It is much to be regretted that the effect is much impaired by some very mean houses built against the base of the towers; these should be at once removed, and the whole front undergo the same careful restoration as that of St. Gudule, at Brussels.

The interior of the choir has been much improved by the addition of a row of stalls on each side, with canopies of rich tabernacle work. These are of very beautiful design, and of such delicate execution as to afford a convincing proof that the Belgian artists have lost but little of their skill in wood carving.

Here, as in most of the churches, there is a great variety of confessionals; it is in these and the pulpits that the finest specimens of wood carving are to be found: the designs are varied in every case, but the merit of the execution is equal in all. The one chosen for the present illustration stands in a chapel of the south aisle of the nave, and is a fair specimen both as to design and execution; it calls for no

* The Norman piers in the nave of Gloucester Cathedral are twenty-one feet in circumference.

† It is curious to observe how many of the finest towers in Belgium are in an unfinished state; the magnificent tower at Mechlin but little more than half the height intended; the two towers of St. Gudule, at Brussels, and the south tower at Antwerp.

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